

CHAPTER SIXTEEN: YOU'VE GOT ALL THE TIME IN THE WORLD

**(From the book *So Many Leaders, So Little Leadership*.
To purchase a copy, please go to the Store section.)**

Time is the great equalizer among people and leaders. You may not have as much talent, skill or money as someone else. For every day you're alive, however, you have as much time—24 hours a day—as anyone else. What you do with that time will determine how successful you are and how effective your leadership will be.

When you think of it, you really *do* have all the time in the world. What are you doing with it? I've found that effective time management is a key element in the successful style and role of any leader. A leader must learn to manage those 24 hours—to avoid the tyranny of the urgent and focus on what is truly important and the highest priority out of all the available priorities. A leader must also stay on top of the details and commitments that are part of every leader's world.

Peter Drucker, when discussing the issue of leadership focus, tells an interesting story about the composer Mozart:

Very few people know where they belong, what kind of temperament and person they are. "Do I work with people, or am I a loner?" And "What are my values? What am I committed to?" And "Where do I belong? What is my contribution?"

And this is, as I said, unprecedented. Those questions were never asked—well, yes, the super achievers asked them. Leonardo DaVinci had one whole notebook in which he asked these questions of himself. And Mozart knew it and knew it very well. He's the only man in the history of music who was equally good on two totally different instruments. He wasn't only a great piano virtuoso; he was an incredible violin virtuoso. And yet, he decided you can only be good in one instrument, because to be good, you have to practice three hours a day. There are not enough hours a day, and so he gave up the violin. He knew it, and he wrote it down. We have his notebooks.

The super achievers always knew when to say “No.” And they always knew what to reach for. And they always knew where to place themselves. That makes them super achievers. And now all of us will have to learn that. It’s not very difficult. The key to it is—what Leonardo did and Mozart did—is to write it down and then check it.¹

Can you imagine being equally world-class in two things and quitting one of them? That really is unprecedented. Mozart, however, still impacts the world with his music because he realized that he had all the time in the world—but not all the time there was. He realized that he was finite and had to make choices about what to do with his time, with those 24 hours a day available to each and every leader. With that in mind, he quit one instrument to concentrate on the other.

Notice that Drucker spoke of values, knowing what’s important to you. Those values should guide your decisions on what to do and what not to do. Then you need to write those down and check your progress and focus from time to time (if you skipped developing your values as discussed in chapter two, go back now and make up the assignment you missed. I told you it was important. You can also access the topic of **Values** under the **Leadership** section of this website).

When I talk of time management or organization to groups of leaders, I usually share my six organizational friends—principles and skills that have made me more effective in the management of my time and life. I talked about four of these friends in my book *Life is a Gold Mine: Can You Dig It?* Since then, I’ve added two more. This book isn’t only about time management, but I feel I should describe them now in this section on self-management.

1. **The book of Proverbs.** I love the book of Proverbs in the Old Testament.

I’ve studied it for 25 years and I still find things I’d never seen before. What I

like best is how practical it is. It contains much useful information on how to live life and how to lead. To my surprise, it also contains material on how to manage time.

To effectively manage your time or organize, you need wisdom. We'll define and study wisdom in the next section when we look at the life of the Old Testament leader Daniel. But for now, let me just mention that wisdom enables you to creatively do things that you've never done before. That's important in time management because every day is different and presents new opportunities and challenges. As you enter new seasons of your life, you need wisdom as well to navigate the challenges of staying on course and focused.

The daily readings in my book, *A Daily Dose of Proverbs*, contains many insights on effective time management, and I encourage you to use them as a daily guide to help you prioritize your world. For the sake of this discussion, let me quote only one verse that has become my "friend" as I manage my time: "For by me [wisdom] your days will be multiplied, and years of life will be added to you" (Proverbs 9:11 NAS).

From that verse, I see that I can effectively "multiply" my days and consequently my effectiveness by applying wisdom where time is concerned. Since Proverbs is a source of wisdom, it's my first friend where time management is concerned.

2. **A time management system.** I now use a Handspring Visor handheld electronic organizer. Prior to that, I used the classic size, Monticello-style Franklin Covey time management system as my notebook to write things such as those that Drucker recommended. It had two pages for every day of the year and it gave me room to include my prioritized daily task list (something I

do almost every day), notes from daily meetings, meeting agendas, and discussion lists for each of my key staff people that include what they are working on. The Visor gives me the same capabilities and is obviously much smaller and simpler to implement.

A yellow tablet and spiral notebook aren't systems. They're places to write things down, but there's little or no chance of retrieving what you record in one of them. I want and need a place to record not only my daily tasks, but my values, job description, goals, long-range projects, key ideas and quotes for review and calendar. The planner system I use provides all that and more, and I carry it with me wherever I go. When someone sees me write something to do in my planner, they know it's as good as done because I'm committed to use that system to keep me focused and on task.

3. **My tech toys.** I have a laptop computer and it gets a lot of use as well. It saves me time and effort as I travel. I also have a Treo phone that enables me to check my email anywhere in the world. I also have an iPod, which I use to listen to downloads and other message. I always carry with me an audio book that I can listen to when I'm in the car or on the road.

I'm surprised how many leaders still don't use a computer or who underutilize technology in their leadership role. There's no excuse for not staying current on technology issues and then effectively using it on a daily basis. If I can do this, anyone can and should. You can't be serious about time management without the proper tools.

4. **When in doubt, throw it out!** A time management expert advised me one time not to go through work to get to work. I listened to what she told me and I am ruthless when it comes to paperwork. At least twice a year, I "clean out"

my office and home files, books, and articles. I refuse to keep anything that I can easily retrieve through some other source. I do the same thing with my computer and regularly work to dump files that I haven't used in the previous 12 months.

I don't like to look at stacks of "stuff" that accumulate because I *may* need them one day. I especially don't like wading through piles to find what I need. So I have an adequate filing system and throw out lots of papers and letters. If there's any doubt, then I usually throw it out and have seldom had any regrets. This "friend" has saved me a lot of time and trouble, and kept my busy world streamlined and efficient.

5. **Delegation.** This friend is closely related to the team-building principle that we discussed earlier. I've found that if I build a team, I have more people around me who may enjoy doing something that I dread or tolerate. Delegation also rewards people for hard work by giving them more responsibility and challenge in the workplace.

Alec MacKenzie, time management author and expert, wrote, "The two key points to keep in mind about delegation: Do it (so you don't spend time doing things others could or should be doing) and do it right (so you won't have to spend time undoing a poor job)."¹ Delegation isn't abandoning tasks and people but rather working with the team to help them be successful and to grow in their abilities and responsibilities. Delegation is my friend because it allows me to expand my leadership without dominating the followers. You should know how important that is to me by now.

6. **Written goals.** I like to write out my goals for the coming year and have done so for a number of years. Merrill and Donna Douglass said it best when they wrote:

Many of us think that writing goals is unnecessary. We often say that we keep goals in our head, and as long as we think about them it doesn't matter whether or not the goals are written down. This is dangerous reasoning. The purpose of writing goals is to clarify them. There seems to be a special kind of magic in writing goals. Once a goal is written, you have more invested in it than before.¹

My goals come from my values and tell me what is important. My goals keep me (most of the time) from investing time in matters that don't matter. For instance, I want to write a book every year for the next ten years. I have five of the titles and topics chosen. That goal will keep me focused when I travel and when I'm home, when other things clamor for my attention and time.

These six friends keep me from wasting all the time in my world. They are

- The book of Proverbs
- A time management system
- My tech toys
- When in doubt, throw it out!
- Delegation
- Written goals

How many of these friends are in your life? Are there other friends that aren't included that have helped you use your time more effectively? I hope there are, because my desire would be for you to manage your time well as a leader or leader-in-training. You and I need all the help we can get.